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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9966
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0432
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0055
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1073
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000307

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LONDON FOR MOC
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KMPI, MO

SUBJECT: Moroccan TV coverage of U.S. elections
highlights Arab-American political participation

Summary and Comment

1. For the first time in history, in 2008 a Moroccan television crew traveled to the U.S. to cover the presidential elections, providing Moroccans a nightly, first-hand glimpse into the American electoral process tailored to their interests. Over the course of ten nights, state-run Al-Aoula television aired almost one hour of total prime-time news coverage on the elections, in both Arabic and French; the reportage was also aired on Al-Aoula's satellite network, Al Maghribiya, which is widely watched by the Moroccan community abroad, particularly in Europe. The stories featured many facets of the campaign, Election Day, and the results, providing interviews and footage of experts, politicians, journalists, candidate staffers and voters, with a particular focus on the Arab-, Muslim-, and particularly Moroccan-American communities. Focus on the election's impact on the lives of Moroccan-Americans was an especially effective means of driving home the importance of participatory governance and the sheer excitement of the democratic process. This coverage was the fruit of an Embassy-organized television cooperative project funded out of the FY08 PD supplemental. End summary and comment.

Historic Elections Coverage by Moroccan
Television Caps Major Mission Effort

2. This project represented the first time that a Moroccan television channel ever sent a crew to cover an American election; Moroccan television networks usually hire freelancers based in the U.S. to comment on such major events via teleconference. Moreover, this TV coop enabled Al-Aoula to cover not only Election Day itself, but also the final days of the electoral campaign and two days following the announcement of the results. The project also supported the participation of a young journalism trainee, who ended up feeding stories in French that were as professional as those of her Arabic-speaking colleague.

3. Al-Aoula's nightly news broadcasts are the most

popular source of news for Moroccans among all available domestic sources, with upwards of thirteen million nightly viewers (roughly one-third the population of the country). Al-Aoula aired a total of thirty news clips as part of the project, for a combined fifty minutes of air time.

¶4. The U.S. Mission in Morocco sent five Moroccan journalists ? four print and one radio ? on Foreign Press Center (FPC) elections reporting tours in 2008, in addition to funding this TV coop. Post also organized numerous interviews locally with official and private Americans. This substantially contributed to voluminous, first-hand coverage of the U.S. elections in all branches of the Moroccan media. A large plurality ? likely even a majority ? of Moroccans were exposed to this coverage, given unprecedented Moroccan interest this year in the American elections process. With local elections coming up in Morocco in June 2009, such exposure to the values and procedures of democracy could not have been better timed.

¶5. Post funded this project through a grant to Meridian International, using FY08 PD supplemental funds. The Moroccan crew ? two journalists and a cameraman ? conducted filming over the course of two weeks in November 2008, working with a producer, contracted by Meridian International, with whom post had worked on a previous TV coop. They visited Washington, DC, New York, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Michigan.

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Covering the Campaign

¶6. Al-Aoula visited the headquarters of the Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), most of whose members expressed their admiration for Obama's domestic policy plans. Concerning international relations, an interviewee expected that Obama would build new alliances. "He inspires hope and change," said another CAIR staffer. CAIR director Daoud Walid stressed the formal neutrality of the organization, saying that "many people are choosing Obama because they are anti-McCain, and not necessarily because they like Obama."

¶7. In another report, Al-Aoula noted that the Arab-American community was never previously as engaged in the presidential elections as it was in 2008. The team visited Dearborn, Michigan, home to one of the most important Arab communities in the U.S. Many people in this area expressed their intention to vote for Obama. "He is closer to the people and he promised to decrease taxes," one shopkeeper stated. Many Dearborn NGOs were engaged in a get-out-the-vote campaign, organizing workshops. Al-Aoula reported that there are more than three million Arabs in the United States, and their vote was very important given their concentration in key swing states. Al-Aoula visited the Arab American National Museum in Detroit to illustrate the historical importance of Arab identity in American history.

¶8. Al-Aoula's crew dedicated several of its stories to the views of the Moroccan-American community in particular. Adil Naji, head of a Moroccan-American friendship association in Michigan, told Al-Aoula that Moroccans were ready more than ever to vote. He explained that Obama's African origins were appealing to Moroccans. Amine Souissi, a chef in

Silver Spring, MD who had spent seventeen years in the U.S., expressed concern about the economic crisis and its impact on his business. He said the new president's priority should be to help citizens get through the recession.

¶9. The crew attended a McCain campaign rally in Pennsylvania, interviewing supporters about their reasons for supporting McCain over Obama. The crew attended a similar rally in Virginia, focusing on vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

¶10. Al-Aoula also reported on the international media frenzy that accompanied the elections, with more than 4,000 international media outlets providing coverage. The 2008 elections were important not only because they would determine the president of the most powerful nation in the world; it had become an interesting story because of the tight race between the candidates. "It has been a wild campaign," a France24 journalist stated. Al-Aoula also reported on the unprecedented amount of money collected and spent by the candidates, noting in particular the immense amount spent by the Obama campaign on television spots.

Election Day

¶11. On Election Day, Al-Aoula explained the vagaries of the American electoral system, and in particular the Electoral College and the importance of swing states like Florida and Ohio. The reporter later followed some voters inside one of Virginia's voting centers. Al-Aoula outlined the problems that could occur during the vote count, reviewing the confusion following the Bush/Gore elections. Al-Aoula reminded viewers that many other elections were taking place at the same time, such as for the

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Senate.

¶12. Al-Aoula aired an interview on Election Day with Jean Pierre Filieu, professor at Georgetown University, on polling. He noted that the polls had been favorable to Obama over the final weeks of the campaign, but the difference between the two candidates had remained very small. The economic crisis seemed to be the primary concern for most Americans, he said, which seemed to favor the Democrats.

¶13. Al-Aoula covered the election returns from the home of a Moroccan-American family in Virginia. Several generations watched the results come in state by state, erupting in joy at the announcement of Obama's election. The father reacted by saying it was high time for change.

JACKSON